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Lovell Radio Telescope refurbished

 By **Dr David Whitehouse**
 BBC News Online science editor

The newly refurbished Lovell Radio Telescope will be officially opened by the Prince of Wales on Monday.

The telescope, at the UK's Jodrell Bank Observatory in Cheshire, has had a £2.5m three-year upgrade during which the old panelling of the of the 76-metre dish has been replaced by a new high-precision surface.



Jodrell will get a fresh view of the cosmos

The new panelling will allow the telescope to operate over a four times greater range of frequencies, so allowing a wider range of astronomical observations.

The telescope's inspiration, Sir Bernard Lovell, said: "When built, the telescope had only been expected to have an operational life of some 10 years.

"I am delighted that 45 years later, not only is it still in daily use but is capable of a far wider range of observations. It is a truly magnificent achievement."

As good as Hubble

When the telescope was built in 1957, it was the world's largest fully steerable radio telescope, a title it held for more than 10 years. It is still in the top few radio telescopes in the world.

Originally called the Mark 1, it was upgraded to the Mark 1a in 1970. It was rededicated the Lovell Radio Telescope in 1987 to mark 30 years of operation.

The latest upgrade was funded by the Wellcome Trust and the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PParc).



Replacing the old surface

PParc's Chief Executive, Professor Ian Halliday, said: "UK astronomy has gone from strength to strength.



Mighty dish gets metal upgrade

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"It is remarkable that the same national facility that enabled UK astronomers to make many important discoveries in the past remains at the forefront of international astronomical research in the future.

"Long may this continue."

In addition to its use as a single instrument, the telescope is a key element of the UK's Multi-Element Radio-Linked Interferometer Network (Merlin) high-resolution radio-imaging array.

Merlin's images in the radio region of the spectrum are of comparable quality to those of the Hubble Space Telescope observing optically.

Merlin is also regularly linked to telescopes across Europe and around the globe to make observations which have the highest resolution in astronomy.

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